

VZCZCXR07681
PP RUEHPA
DE RUEHMV #1037 3511641
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 161641Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY MONROVIA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0622
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L MONROVIA 001037

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/16/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM LI

SUBJECT: LIBERIA: TAYLOR'S FORMER PARTY HOLDS 5000 PERSON RALLY

Classified By: DCM Brooks Robinson for reasons 1.4 B and D.

¶1. (SBU) Former President Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Party (NPP) organized a rally in Monrovia December 13 to solidify its membership base and begin preparations for its 2011 election campaign. An enthusiastic crowd of 5000 party leaders, members, and ex-combatants from the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) attended. Former NPFL commander John T. Richardson, a.k.a. "General Octopus," read a letter Charles Taylor wrote from his cell in the Hague specifically for his supporters gathered at the event. Taylor told them that he was in good health and urged the NPP to rise up and be a political force to be reckoned with once again.

¶2. (SBU) Former National Security Advisor to Charles Taylor and presumptive NPP 2011 presidential candidate Lewis Brown delivered the keynote address, calling for all disaffected party members to return and stressing the need to cooperate with other parties to form a credible opposition. Both George Weah's Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) and Charles Brumskine's Liberty Party participated in the rally. The NPP asked both of these parties as well as the Liberian Action Party to join together with the NPP to form an opposition coalition to run against the ruling Unity Party in the 2011 elections.

¶3. (SBU) Senior CDC member Samuel Browne said the CDC was seriously considering the NPP's proposal and would make its formal reply in the near future. Browne was optimistic about the CDC's ability to work well with the NPP, but said that any meaningful coalition with Liberty Party would prove to be too difficult because of Brumskine's "me or nobody else" policy. (Note: Brumskine was a founding member of the NPP in 1996 but was forced to flee Liberia to the United States in 1999 when Taylor sensed his presidential ambitions. He formed the Liberty Party upon his return and has yet to reconcile with the NPP's current leadership. End note.)

¶4. (C) COMMENT: The NPP is keeping its ties with Taylor more out of fear for his possible return than out of loyalty. If Taylor is put away for a long time, he will lose whatever remaining support he has. The former backers of Taylor appear to be trying to legitimize their financial and political gains made during the Taylor era. By being accepted into the political mainstream, their chances of being charged with war crimes, or of having their wealth confiscated by the government for reparations, are lessened.

THOMAS-GREENFIELD